

## This Day in History... December 19, 1875

### Birth of Carter G. Woodson

Carter Godwin Woodson was born on December 19, 1875, in New Canton, Virginia. He was the second African American to earn a PhD from Harvard and has been called the Father of Black History.

Woodson was the son of former slaves who had aided Union soldiers during the Civil War. He rarely attended school when he was young because he had to help on the farm, but he taught himself as much as he could. When he was 17, Woodson went to Huntington, West Virginia to attend Douglass High School. He spent three years working in nearby coal mines before he was admitted in 1895. Woodson went on to teach and then attend Kentucky's Berea College and the University of Chicago, where he earned his Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees. In 1912, he became the second African American (after W.E.B. Du Bois) to earn a PhD from Harvard.

After graduating, Woodson taught at public schools, served as a principal, and later as a professor and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Howard University. Woodson had earned his PhD in history and was a member of the American Historical Association (AHA). However, the AHA didn't allow him to attend conferences. Woodson felt he had no future in this profession and decided that he needed to create a new institutional structure to help African Americans study history. He received financial support from the Carnegie Foundation, the Julius Rosenwald Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Woodson also felt that black history had been ignored or incorrectly represented by scholars around the world. He made it his goal to research their history and established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History on September 9, 1915. His stated goal was "to treat the records scientifically and to publish the findings of the world" to avoid "the awful fate of becoming a negligible factor in the thought of the world." Woodson published books on African American education, migration, religion, and history.

Through his work, Woodson sought to guide African Americans in conducting their own research and methodology. He worked with community leaders, teachers, churches, and women's and civic groups to promote a better understanding of their history. In 1916, he published the first edition of the *Journal of Negro History*. The journal has been published continuously for over 100 years, though it's now known as the *Journal of African American History*.



Woodson donated his collection of 5,000 items to the Library of Congress.

In 1926, Woodson staged Negro History during the second week in February, marking the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Woodson said "It is not so much a Negro History Week as it is a History Week. We should emphasize not Negro History, but the Negro in History. What we need is not a history of selected races or nations, but the history of the world void of national bias, race hatred and religious prejudice." Woodson's idea was popular and grew over the years to include parades, lectures, and banquets. Then in 1970, February was established as Black History Month.

Woodson died from a heart attack on April 3, 1950. Schools, parks, and streets in 14 states and Washington, DC have been named in Woodson's honor. In 1974, the Carter G. Woodson Book Award was established "for the most distinguished social science books appropriate for young readers that depict ethnicity in the United States." His home in Washington, DC, has been preserved as national historic site. The Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum was opened in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 2006.



Woodson was the seventh honoree in the Black Heritage Series.

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